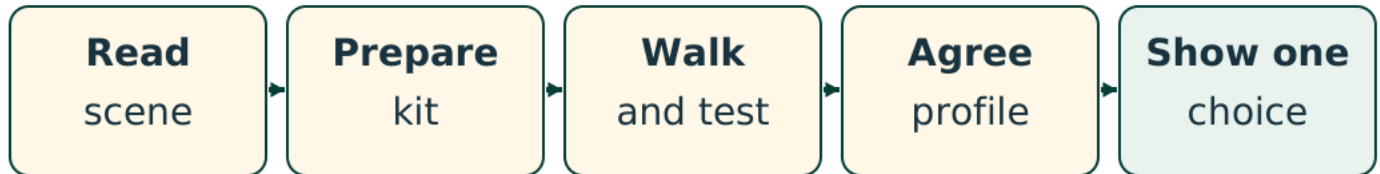




Guide Handbook

Prepare a first session, then adapt the challenge to your room and players. Keep this handbook beside the selected adventure and current hero references; their complete rules remain your starting point.



Prepare first • Demonstrate next • Then let the group choose

Before anyone arrives

- 1 Read the whole adventure. Find the objective, starting state, required props, threats, resets and ending. Choose one short, fully specified scene.
- 2 Prepare exact hero and enemy Defense Bags, PWR counters, a USED area, soft throws, separate targets, clues and the round strip. Keep Guide answers hidden.
- 3 Walk every route. Remove trip hazards and fragile objects; keep exits open. Check reach, lighting, labels and prop stability. Try each task with the actual materials.
- 4 Decide the play profile before play. Record any house adjustments, check affected Skills and explain the same rules to everyone.

Open with the goal

“Your job is to recover the relic. These objects may be handled; those are scenery. We walk, throw only at separate targets and stop immediately when anyone says stop.”

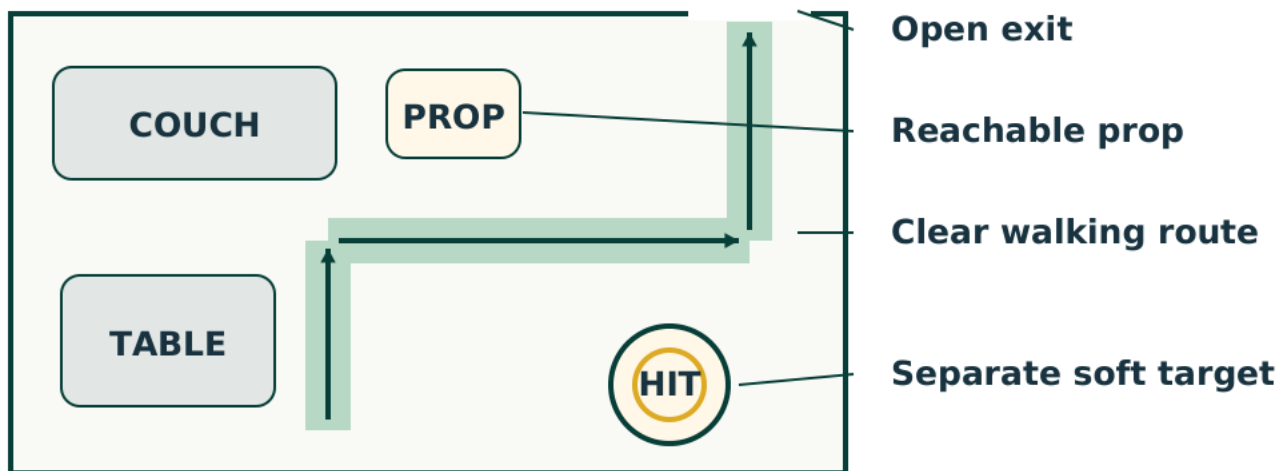
Start with pages 1–5. Facilitation and profiles: 6–8. Optional rule adjustments: 9–13. Guide Tools: 14–15. Session card and sources: 16–17.

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Make safe routes obvious

This is an illustrative room, not a required adventure layout. Arrange the actual space so players can move, see the task and handle the props safely.



Illustrative setup only • Never throw at people

Walk the route before play

Clear cables, loose rugs and fragile items. Keep exits open. Avoid climbing, body contact and stretching over furniture. A table can hold props; it does not replace real-space play.

Separate the people from the target

Use soft targeting pieces and separate targets. Walk, never throw at people or animals, and pause play to retrieve loose pieces. Demonstrate the agreed throw procedure before the first scored attempt.

Agree on a stop signal

Pause immediately for discomfort or unsafe activity. Check reach, lighting and readable labels with the players. Adjust the task or room; never treat unsafe difficulty as part of the challenge.

Safety is not an optional rule to omit. The physical task should represent fictional danger without requiring real danger.



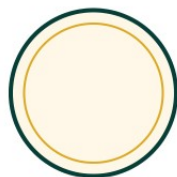
Teach the next useful choice



Bag



Pieces



Plates



Soft throws



Cups



Paper

Show before explaining

Let each player find their Move, attack, ancestry, Skills and Talents. Demonstrate one Move and one ordinary attack without scoring it. Say what counts as HIT and MISS before the practice throw.

Choose one shared Step length. About 3 feet is the recommended starting point, not a requirement. Choose another safe length if needed and use that same measure for everyone. Keep printed numeric distances unchanged.

Make the bag easy to read

Life, Armor, Dodge and Wild pieces should feel alike when drawn. Use letters or symbols as well as color. Ordinary READY pieces are available in the bag; USED pieces stay outside it. TEMP needs its own clear label and source.

Use the printed bag recipe and starting TEMP. TEMP is not ordinary Life and cannot keep a hero conscious after all ordinary Life is USED. Do not add TEMP merely because spare pieces are available.

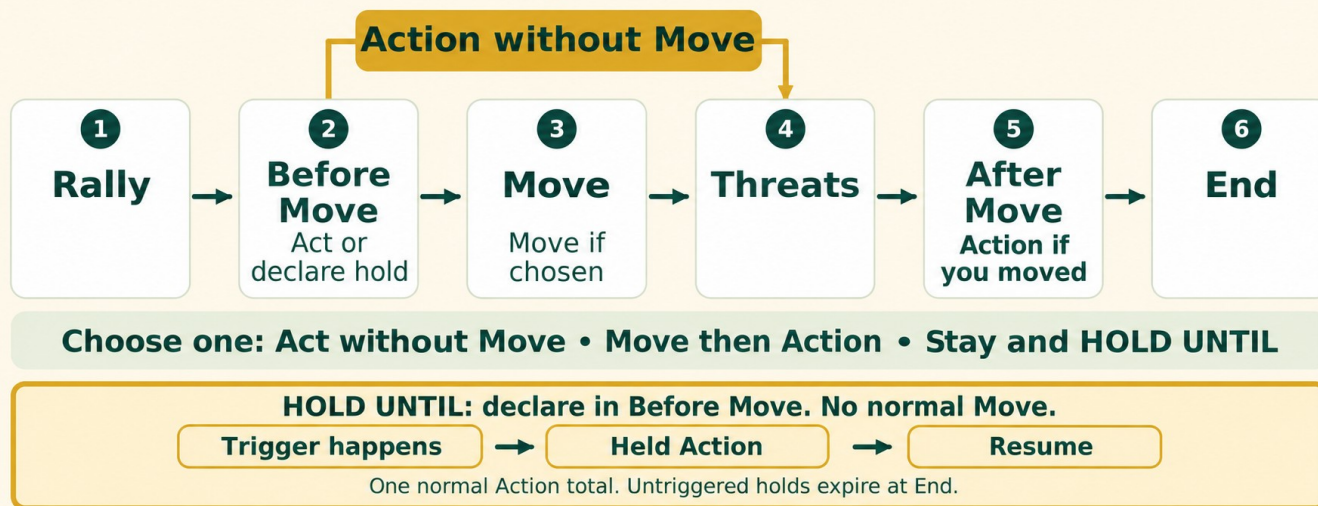
Ask “What do you want your hero to do?” Then point to the relevant rule. Resolve one choice slowly, let the next player try, and explain additional rules when they first matter.



See the whole round

ONE ROUND • SIX STEPS

Each Hero chooses one Action path.



At Rally, choose +1 PWR OR ready one eligible USED reusable combat Skill. Rally does not restore Defense Pieces or refresh a spent once-per-combat allowance.

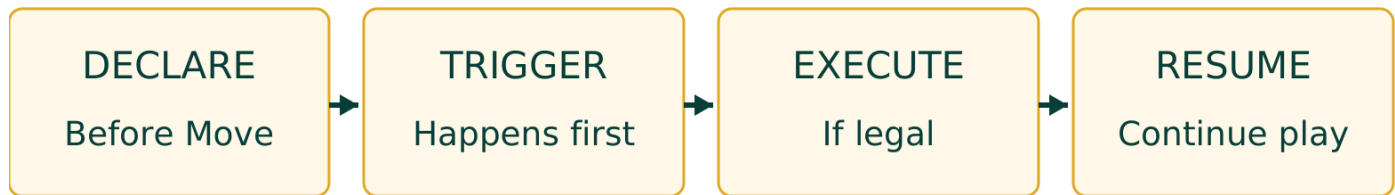
One normal Action

A hero may act before Move and stay; Move then act; or stay and hold their normal Action. The Core Six normally Move up to 2 Steps; Moss as Wolf has 3. Follow each printed exception.

Read the phase strip aloud when teaching. Threats act in their printed timing; a held Hero Action is not an extra turn. The chosen adventure may use a scene-specific Threats label such as Guardian.



Hold act and recover



No normal Move • One normal Action • Pay only on execution

HOLD UNTIL

Before Move, name a specific observable trigger, the Action and its target or target-selection rule. Commit your normal Action and take no normal Move that round. After the trigger happens, resolve immediately if legal, before the activity continues. Pay normal costs and apply the actual after-use rule only when executing. An unused hold expires at End.

"I stay here and hold my basic attack until that enemy enters its legal range." This grants no extra Action and is not automatically a Response. Threats keep their printed timing.

Read costs and recovery separately

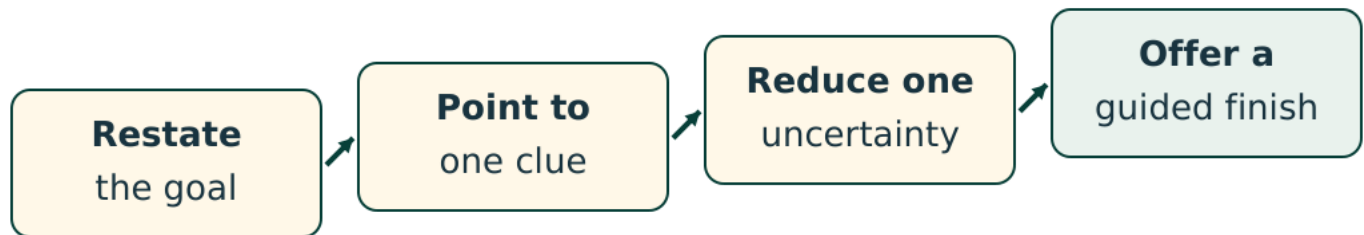
PWR is a resource, not a use state. A 0 PWR Skill may still use an Action and become USED. A Skill that stays READY still follows its frequency limit. Return USED Skills to READY only through their permitted recovery.

At End, expire unused holds and apply printed cleanup. Combat end, starting another combat and encounter reset are different events. Follow the adventure's reset; never refill Defense automatically at Rally or merely because a new combat begins.

Keep choices moving

Your job is to make the situation clear

Describe what heroes can observe, what matters and their available choices. Run threats fairly and give everyone a useful opportunity; you are not trying to defeat them.



If the group stalls: restate the goal; point to an available clue; reduce one uncertainty; then offer a guided completion or an agreed alternative. Check for a missing or unreadable clue before treating confusion as failure.

“You have the three pictures. Which one matches this symbol?” is more useful than repeatedly saying “try again.” Ask before a helper takes over.

Rotate inspecting, reading, carrying, planning and checking. Invite a quieter player to choose a job. Ask a fast solver to explain a clue rather than perform every step. A player can direct a willing helper without losing ownership of the idea.

Make fair rulings and useful endings

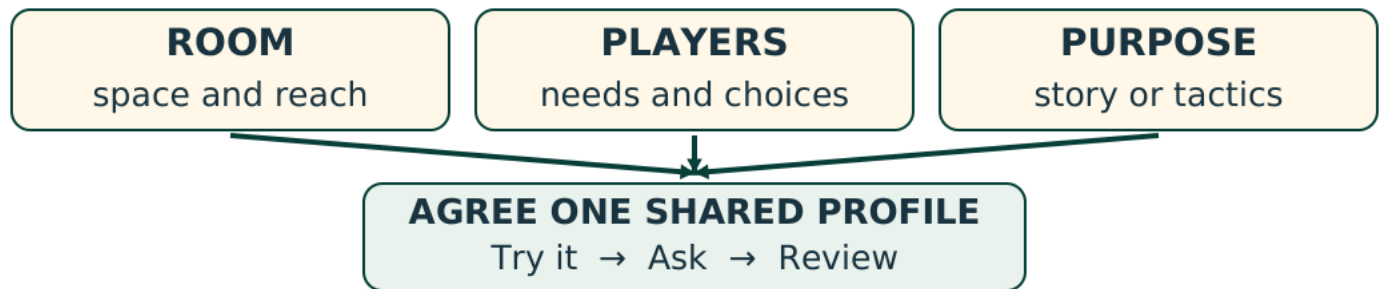
State the goal, allowed method and result before an attempt. Accept any solution that meets them. Do not add a new requirement after success. On failure, use the stated consequence and reset; avoid endless retries. Pause unsafe or unclear activity, preserve the game state and explain the next step.

Missed an instruction? Pause, clarify and offer an agreed practice replay. Label it teaching—not a secret bonus. Record unresolved rulings separately from canon.



Use age as a starting question

Use age as a starting question—not a prediction of reading, attention, coordination or confidence. These suggestions are not official age limits.



Younger children or new readers

Begin with one visible goal and a short demonstration. Read choices aloud, pair words with symbols, and let players point or explain in their own words. Offer a small number of useful choices without choosing for them.

Older children and growing confidence

Offer distinct jobs, a short planning pause and one new mechanic at a time. Let players explain a rule back. Ask whether they enjoy extra tactical choices before increasing complexity.

Teens and adults including first timers

Do not assume experience. Offer the same clear demonstration, then add timing and resource decisions when wanted. A relaxed story-focused group may prefer fewer rules at any age.

Mixed ages or different access needs

Use one shared rule profile. Read text aloud, increase label contrast, make props reachable and keep walking routes practical. Ask what support each player prefers. Keep physical play in the real room; a table may hold props, not replace the space with a miniature game.

Watch for frustration, fatigue and waiting. Pause, simplify the next task or end at a satisfying point. Never make physical difficulty a punishment.



Treat rules as a framework

The rules are your shared starting point. The options on pages 9–13 are proposed house adjustments—not new Core canon. Choose them for your room, audience and purpose.

KEEP

Actions and Rally
PWR and use states

SIMPLIFY

Teach one choice
Use clear reminders

OMIT

Agree before play
Review affected Skills

First time or younger group

Suggested starting profile: one clear objective, a HIT-only target, no optional POWER HIT upgrades and encounters without RESIST-dependent effects. Consider no Armor Intercept only after checking its larger survival impact. Keep Actions, held Actions, Rally, PWR costs and READY/USED.

Mixed group

Begin with that same shared profile, use rotating jobs and readable reminders, then add one mechanic between scenes if everyone wants it. Do not give older players a different scoring rule without a clear agreed reason.

Experienced or tactical group

Use the full printed procedures and bring in additional interactions gradually. Complexity is a preference, not a reward for being older.

Check the consequences of every omission

Identify affected heroes, threats, costs and objectives. Avoid a setup that makes someone's defining Skill useless. Choose a compatible reference or an explicitly agreed substitute before play. Do not charge for an effect you removed.

The simplified Vault has its own supplied profile and references. Do not add omitted full-Core mechanics or assume all house adjustments here already belong to that pack.



Play without CRIT

CORE Eligible Precision



Profile defines
CRIT region

No default Melee or Magic CRIT

OPTIONAL HIT only



Center stays
ordinary HIT

No special center result

Eligible Precision attacks use the target profile's defined CRIT region and agreed procedure. Melee and Magic have no default CRIT. CRIT adds no automatic HARM, extra draw or POWER HIT; it blocks defensive Reactions/Responses for that attack. Wild and eligible TEMP still protect. Ordinary Armor Intercept and a separately required RESIST can still apply. Choose HIT-only scoring when learning the basic attack sequence, when the distinction is hard to see, or when fine scoring interrupts the story. Remove or cover the CRIT label so the physical target agrees with your rule.

House example: "Every part of this marked target is HIT. Outside is MISS. The center gives no special result." Use the agreed boundary procedure consistently; do not improvise a CRIT because a throw looks impressive.

Check before choosing it

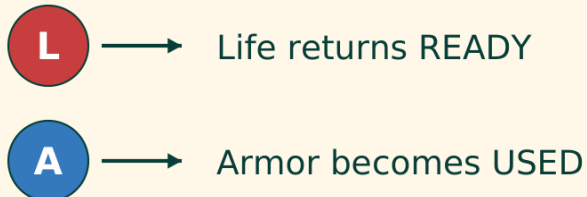
CRIT-triggered features lose their trigger, and defensive Responses remain available where CRIT would have blocked them. Review those Skills before selecting heroes and threats. This may change encounter difficulty; it is not automatically balance-neutral.

Guide hint: ask players to show HIT and MISS on the actual target. In the simplified Vault profile, the center of the cross is HIT and the hoop rim counts as HIT; those are that profile's instructions, not a universal Core target rule.

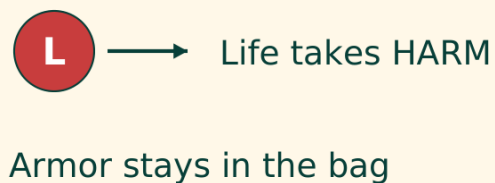


Play without Armor Intercept

CORE Intercept available



OPTIONAL No Intercept



Once per round, after an eligible Melee, Precision or Magic attack draws ordinary Life and before HARM, return that Life READY and mark one READY ordinary Armor USED instead. This includes Precision CRIT. Armor Intercept is not a Reaction; TEMP Armor cannot Intercept.

Consider omitting it if the extra decision after a draw repeatedly breaks the group's flow. First try a visible "Intercept available / spent this round" reminder; that may solve the problem without changing the rule.

House example: "Today we resolve the Defense piece drawn without swapping Life for Armor." A Life draw therefore resolves normally even if READY Armor remains.

Check before choosing it

Life can be lost sooner, and Armor-heavy heroes lose an important protection. Do not assume enemies and heroes are affected equally. Review the encounter's pressure and the available healing; use a suitable shorter teaching encounter rather than silently changing results mid-combat.

Guide hint: removing Intercept does not remove Armor pieces or Mara's separate Interpose Skill. Keep ordinary Armor draw outcomes, printed bag amounts, costs and recovery unchanged unless separately agreed. Record that this was a house profile when reviewing the result.



Play without POWER HIT

CORE POWER HIT · Draw up to 2 · Resolve one result



OPTIONAL Omit upgrade → ordinary attack draw

POWER HIT occurs only when a rule grants it. Draw up to two pieces without replacement. Resolve Wild first; otherwise the first eligible TEMP in final draw order; otherwise the attacker chooses one ordinary piece for HARM 1. Return the other unchanged. Used Wild stays out; used TEMP is removed. This is not an extra attack or extra HARM. Armor Intercept can still apply when ordinary Life is selected.

For a first demonstration, omit optional POWER HIT upgrades and resolve ordinary attacks normally. Keep other Skills that spend PWR and retain the Rally choice so players still learn the resource system.

House example: “Mara does not activate the optional Smite POWER HIT upgrade in this scene. Her ordinary legal attack still works; no Smite PWR cost is paid.”

Check before choosing it

An optional upgrade can be left unused. A Skill whose main effect requires POWER HIT needs a compatible replacement or an explicitly agreed full rewrite before play; do not simply remove its effect and retain its price. Threat POWER HIT must be reviewed too.

Guide hint: say “no POWER HIT upgrades this scene,” not “no Power.” Players may still gain PWR, pay printed costs for other Skills, choose Rally recovery and track READY/USED. Keep remaining frequency limits intact.



Simplify throw distances

CORE Shared Step measure



Check the printed range

OPTIONAL Throw setup



Keep target legality checks

Check the attack or Skill's legal target, printed range and agreed Real-Space Targeting procedure. The shared Step measure applies consistently. A shorter physical throw does not automatically change a Skill's legal range or area.

Choose a safe shared Step length for the actual space. Use the selected profile's permitted target setup and practice it. Keep sight lines and walkways clear. Never compensate for limited space with harder or unsafe throws.

House example: "We use these marked safe throwing positions for target attempts in this scene. We still check each Skill's printed target and range." Explain which positions may be used and when before starting.

If you omit range checks too

That is a separate, larger house change. Define exactly which attacks it affects and the permitted play area. Ranged heroes, close-range Skills, movement and cover may lose important differences; review every selected reference rather than writing "all ranges ignored."

Guide hint: the simplified Vault pack already omits throw ranges in its own profile. Follow its complete procedure. Do not carry that omission into every Core adventure or erase movement distances, areas, reach or unrelated targeting restrictions.



Reduce RESIST bookkeeping

CORE Use the effect's named type and draw count

Draw in order → Stop on success → Return ordinary draws

Named type or Wild succeeds · Successful Wild stays USED

OPTIONAL Choose effects without RESIST

RESIST is a separate attempt against an effect, using that effect's exact required Defense Type, draw count and duration. Draw one at a time without replacement, holding failures aside; stop on success. The named ordinary type or Wild succeeds. Return ordinary draws READY; used Wild stays out for combat. Exclude TEMP unless expressly allowed.

For an introductory scene, select threats and tasks without RESIST-dependent effects. This reduces bookkeeping without turning every such effect into an automatic success or an automatic failure.

House example: choose an enemy with an ordinary attack rather than one whose encounter role depends on immobilizing heroes. Keep its complete selected attack rule and bag, rather than deleting only the heroes' defense attempt.

If changing an existing effect

Agree on the entire replacement before play, including its timing, result, cost, duration and limits. Making the effect automatic is harsher; removing it weakens the threat and can remove useful recovery choices. Never invent one universal RESIST draw count.

Guide hint: first try a short prompt: "Which type? How many draws? When does it end?" Use the printed answers. The Vault pack's simplified Dwarf protection is a specific ancestry instruction, not permission to remove all RESIST from Core.



Build a clear physical task

Nine established tools, with configurable props and procedures. These examples grant no extra Skills or automatic bonuses.



Patrol

Move an observer along a declared route while heroes collect objects unseen. State what counts as detection and its consequence; walk the route first and preserve actual safe passage.

Careful Carry

Transport a fragile relic with a stated handling rule. Demonstrate the permitted grip, finish and drop reset. Choose safe, unbreakable props; do not turn a spill into a race.

Keep Watch

Ask a watcher to notice a changing sign or approaching threat. Make the relevant cue visible and give the watcher a clear way to report it. Rotate the role.

Hold the Gate

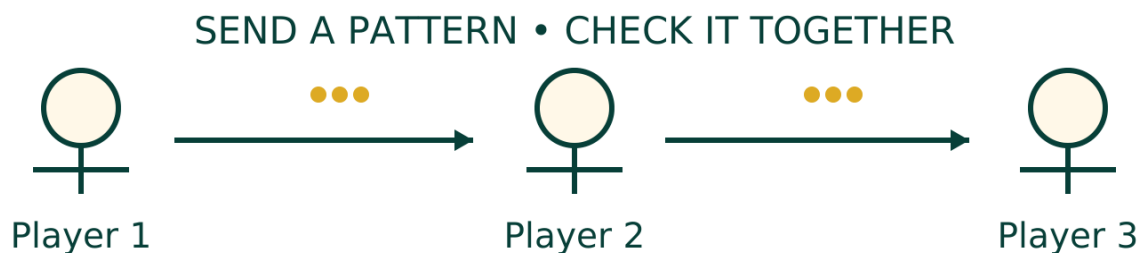
Represent keeping a passage open with an agreed station task while allies pass. Use a marker, not a real door that can trap someone. Explain when the task starts and ends.

Cross the Hazard

Mark a safe route representing unstable ground. Specify permitted steps and the game consequence of a mistake. Fictional danger never requires real jumping, climbing or blocked exits.



Give the group useful jobs



Retrieve the Relic

Reach an object across a restricted game area using the declared safe method. Mark the boundary and permitted equipment. Keep real reach practical; do not encourage stretching over furniture.

Send the Signal

Reproduce a pattern or communicate across the room. State what information can be shared and how success is checked. Offer clear symbols and comfortable sound levels.

Power the Device

Coordinate tasks at one or more stations. Demonstrate what each station contributes and when they must work together. “Power” here is story language, not a new PWR cost unless a rule explicitly says so.

Escape the Search

Avoid a sweeping observer by hiding or relocating within the permitted area. Explain detection and a safe reset. No running, physical pursuit or hiding in unsafe spaces is required.

Combine tools only when it helps

Example: one player Keeps Watch while another performs Careful Carry. Begin with each task separately; combine them when everyone understands both. Give the other heroes a meaningful role rather than extra waiting.



One page session card

Adventure and version _____

Heroes and player count _____

Room and safety

Play boundary and open exits _____

Shared Step length and measure _____

Stop signal and support choices _____

Goal and procedures

Objective and visible progress _____

Allowed prop handling _____

HIT / MISS procedure _____

Threats and exact references _____

Agreed profile

CRIT _____ Armor Intercept _____ POWER HIT _____

Throw setup _____ Printed range checks _____

RESIST-dependent effects _____

Affected Skills reviewed and replacements agreed _____

Consequences and ending

Failure or detection result _____

Reset point and what it restores _____

Ending condition _____

After play: record one thing that worked and one change to test next time. Note the profile when comparing difficulty. Ask what players enjoyed; do not record personal assessments of children. Keep house adjustments separate from approved rules.



Keep the right references nearby

What this handbook covers

First-session preparation and teaching; practical facilitation; suggested audience profiles; optional simplifications; the nine Guide Tools; and a reusable session card. It does not reproduce every hero, condition, attack result or adventure rule.

Use these with it

Current Getting Started and Quick Reference: complete attack, Defense, condition and recovery procedures. Current hero and threat references: each cost, trigger, range, frequency and after-use rule. Selected adventure: its setup, special profile, objectives and reset.

The companion Props and Materials Guide supplies visual household-prop ideas and optional purchase links. The longer Guide's Handbook contains extended tool examples and printable planners; it remains a separate reference.

Edition and source notes

ASQ Core Guide Handbook concise review draft v0.2 • 1 November 2026. Practical advice and house profiles are offered for review. They do not replace current canon or the selected encounter.

Source checks: Guide's Handbook, Library version 6, especially pages 7–9 and 24–27; current Getting Started combat teaching; Combat Steps and Start Rules Addendum version 4; Formatting and Style Guide version 9; simplified Vault Guardian Starter version 9. Later Core authoring declarations control real-space play, READY/USED, Steps and held Actions.

Keep the framework flexible and the agreement clear: decide changes before play, explain their effects, apply them consistently, stop for safety, and review the result together. Add complexity only when it improves the experience.

Created by Scott Szparagowski. Published by Spare-A-Game LLC.